

The Purdue Technology Center of Southeast Indiana is a shining star for start-up companies.



Industry Boom

Southern Region Developing Into Tech Hotbed

By Charlee Beasor

While southeastern Indiana is known for its rural appeal, no one should consider the region to be behind the times or low-tech. With the help of state and local government entities, as well as surrounding universities, technology parks and high-tech companies are beginning to pop up and expand across the region.

The types of technology-related companies in the area vary and include biomedical, life sciences, energy, advanced manufacturing and electronics – just to name a few.

Starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel, existing businesses are looking at expanding their facilities and product lines in the area. While that bodes well, one of the more promising realities is that new technology companies are starting to relocate there for myriad reasons, including tax abatements and education opportunities.

John Shine, owner of Samtec, donated 40 acres to the Purdue Research Foundation to build the New Albany facility.

If you educate, they will come

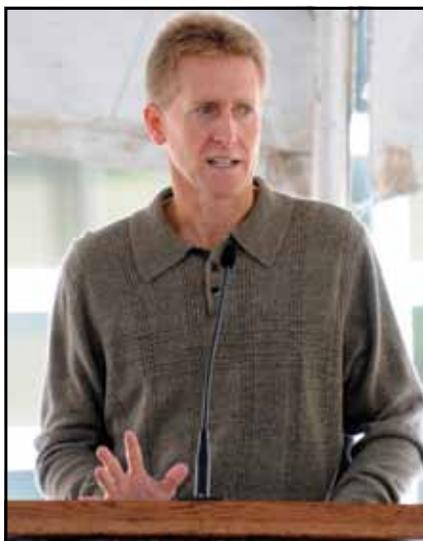
On the forefront of technology and education for the region is the Purdue Technology Center of Southeast Indiana, located in New Albany. The park was completed in August 2008 and has since welcomed five companies, with space available for more.

Joe Hornett, COO of the Purdue Research Foundation, credits a land donation from the Shine family of New Albany for the existence of the facility. Hornett notes that John Shine sought to increase area education by providing the foundation with 40 acres. Shine is the owner of Samtec, a worldwide manufacturer of electronic interconnects.

“With John Shine, his interest was in having more students with four-year technology degrees within the region be potential employees for his company,” Hornett attests. “Part of this location actually grew out of an owner’s explicit need of more (qualified) students. It’s something Purdue had to offer; he (Shine) was willing to put his money where his mouth was, and we’re the beneficiaries of that.”

Blayr Barnard, regional director of the Southeast Indiana Small Business Development Center (SISBDC), also connects that where there is education, technology follows.

“I think the main reason that the technology businesses are starting to come here is there are a lot of universities down here: IUS (Indiana University Southeast), Purdue, UK (University of Kentucky), University of Louisville, Bellarmine. It’s really helping that,” she observes. “Also, there is just a kind of an entrepreneur community starting to take



hold down here.”

Hornett adds that while the foundation is looking to increase the education of the entire region, the main push is to develop the technology sector.

“Somewhere down the road, we will be looking for additional property, for other locations in Southeast Indiana. We’re going to continue to nurture start-up companies that then wind up taking hold and growing roots in Southeast Indiana and continue to expand the employment base out of this group of companies,” he remarks.

Incubators offer advanced opportunities

For companies that have an expertise but are in need of the space and support to develop and market those technologies, landing in an incubator facility could provide the needed tools.

One example is New Albany’s IKOTECH. The medical device company is a spinoff of Techshot, a longtime Hoosier success story that has partnered with Purdue on a program designed to accelerate the development of emerging tech companies.

“Being located in a tech park offers opportunities ... early companies need,” IKOTECH President David Kennedy explains. “As an entrepreneur, you need to be surrounded by other people who think in that mode. Being in a tech park helps with that culture of innovation.”

IKOTECH is working on technology that would rapidly purify cells for cell therapy. It carries with it the potential for curing Type I diabetes and is currently in the pre-clinical studies phase.

“Our ultimate objective is treating and curing patients. Personally, I lost my mother to breast cancer back in 2000. It’s one of the reasons I got into this in the first place. Our vision is that someday it will have a life-changing effect on somebody,” he acknowledges.

The company was the first to locate inside the Purdue

park in New Albany. Already, Kennedy sees the technology community developing in the region.

“It’s really interesting; there are small pockets of very innovative activities going on. I’m excited to see a location where we can focus all of it and bring it all together,” he says.

Regional push

Not that the Purdue development is the only one in the region to encourage the technology sector. There are growing technology parks in Scottsburg, Lawrenceburg and Charlestown as well.

“All of them have their own personality. There are definitely not any two tech parks that are alike,” Barnard notes.

The city of Scottsburg recently purchased an old factory that it is turning into an active tech park. Reconstruction on the facility, named the Mid-America Science Park, is scheduled to be complete in early 2011.

“It will have 44 incubators and laboratories in there; we’re going to do some advanced manufacturing training and renewable energy training,” Mayor William Graham describes. “We’re trying to make sure we’ve got all the technology to bring entrepreneurs in, and they can make a product.”

Graham credits the town’s recently upgraded infrastructure as a critical piece in sustaining the companies in the area.

“We’re always very sincere about working with existing companies and new companies that are coming in,” Graham explains. “We work very hard to help them with tax abatements or job training, even such things as making sure they’ve got the Internet speed and bandwidth they have to have.”

Their efforts have attracted wire manufacturer Tokusen USA, a subsidiary of a Japanese business. The company will manufacture special wires that are used to saw ultra-thin wafers, which are then processed into solar cells.

Students from the Purdue College of Technology gain classroom and hands-on experience inside the tech center. David Kennedy (at left in right photo), president of IKOTECH, believes innovation thrives in the research park setting.





The Ivy Tech campus in Lawrenceburg is home to a technology park that includes companies such as PDS Biotechnology, which works to develop cancer therapies.

“We’re very pleased with them coming in; it’s a tremendous help. In the first year, we expect them to employ around 150 people. The investment they’ve made and are making is really up in the tens of millions of dollars. They really, really have been a great boost to the economy of Scott County,” Graham says.

Using technology to stay competitive

One unknown is what kind of technology center the region might become.

“What’s interesting (is that) technology can be so many different things. There are hubs in each region, but I don’t think our hub has been determined yet,” Barnard adds. “There is some wind, some energy, some medical, and I think that will emerge in the future.”

Whatever comes its way, Graham insists that continuing to support technology will keep the state in the forefront of the global economy.

“I think it’s important to the whole state, not just this region. It certainly is a global world today, and you see so many countries that are ahead of us in technology today. I think it’s crucial that we catch up to and exceed those technologies,” he asserts. “Technology is going to play a tremendous role.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Blayr Barnard, SISBDC, at www.isbdc.org

Mayor William Graham, city of Scottsburg, at (812) 752-4343

Joe Hornett, Purdue Research Foundation, at www.prf.org

David Kennedy, IKOTECH, at www.ikotech.com



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